1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

in the study of these historical cultures is equally barred. Very few historical records exist, and they are hardly informative from the sociological point of view. The people of Nupe have not yet risen to the stage of education producing written records and accounts of important events or institutions. With the exception of a few educated Mohammedan scholars whose co-operation I was able to enlist in the recording of folklore and historical traditions, I have been unable to use a single literate informant, for example, to keep diaries of important events, or to handle questionnaires. Lastly, the most essential evidence in the study of complex societies, namely statistics, scarcely exists. The statistics in this book were, with few exceptions, compiled single-handed and on a scale of the inadequacy of which no one can be more aware than the author.

I have described elsewhere the technique of inquiry which I applied, and need say nothing on that point here.[1] But it is necessary to describe the general plan of research I pursued, for it illustrates the methods by which I attempted to circumvent some of the difficulties just mentioned. I spent two years in the field, in the course of two expeditions in 1934 and 1935–6. From the outset I was confronted with the problem how to cover, in intensive study, the vast area inhabited by the Nupe people. The political configuration forbade the selection of one section to the disregard of others. The widespread political system had clearly to be studied at different points, in its centre as well as on its periphery. Moreover, a short preliminary survey already revealed the existence of considerable cultural differences within the tribe. The further my studies proceeded the more manifest became the significance of these differences as variations of a common pattern, the study of which was essential to the understanding of the forces that moulded the culture of the people. The investigation thus became perforce a comparative study within the framework of one tribe and one culture. At a certain stage of my investigation I even had to go outside this framework and devote some study to neighbouring groups—the Kakanda, Gbari, and Bassa—which, closely akin to the Nupe and partly their fellow citizens in the Nupe kingdom, might throw light on certain aspects of Nupe culture.

The main problem was to discover representative sections and centres for the study of this widely spread social system and its varying culture. I will not speak of the difficulties which I encountered in this task, helped as I was only by records and information which soon proved superficial and inexact. In the first six or seven months I was reduced almost to the method of trial and error: a very short stay in a new place would have been useless even merely to discover whether or not this place might prove a useful centre; and once I decided on a long stay the time was gone and could not be recovered even if the place turned out to be less profitable than I had expected. Let me admit that this did indeed happen in two villages (Mokwa and Sakpe) which I had made my centres upon the advice of various informants and which, as I discovered later, were not as significant or essential as certain other places would have been. However, certain general facts about the culture and the

[1] See 'The Interview Technique in Social Anthropology', in *The Study of Society*, chapter xiii, 1939.

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FF52 Nupe FF52

hundreds of Mallams of the lower grade, there are few real scholars, and they are well known and highly esteemed. These scholars will occupy that most influential position which a Mohammedan culture accords to the men of learning.[1] Their advice will be sought by friends and strangers, in matters spiritual or profane.[2] The important political and religious offices of judge, scribe, and Imam at the town mosque are open to them. Some become attached to a noble household as 'private chaplain'. Royal princes and noblemen will seek their friendship, give them their daughters in marriage without bride-price, regarding marriage with a Mallam as *sádaka*, pious alms. Such is, the Nupe say, the *cinwa katū*, the Greatness of Learning. To some extent, however, the high reputation of the learned profession is reflected also in the persons of lesser erudition. Learning is, after all, relative. And a Mallam of very inferior scholarship judged by Bida standards, may be revered as a fount of knowledge in a small half-pagan village. These Mallams in the villages are frequently supported by the people and receive annual gifts of crops as *dzankó*, tithe.

The Mallams are, above all, teachers. They teach both children and adults, the former the Koran and the latter 'knowledge'. Every Mallam may, besides, be called in to perform a marriage ceremony or to officiate at a funeral—services for which they are remunerated according to their status and reputation. A few are well-to-do and own land, which is worked by their sons and pupils or, in some cases, by wage-labour. But most Mallams practise, in addition to teaching, some other occupation, which may or may not be associated with their scholarly profession, to supplement the meagre income of a Koran teacher. Some write out and illuminate pages of the Koran, or copy Arabic manuscripts, for sale. You can buy a sheet of this sort, very beautifully illuminated, for 5*d.* on the Bida market; more ambitious scribes would sell a whole copy of the Koran and receive for it—the work of five months—£1. Students of 'knowledge' eagerly buy these copies and use them in their studies. Other Mallams, again, embroider gowns, make straw hats or saddle-cloths, or do tailoring.

The size and standard of the Koran schools varies as widely as the status and standard of learning of the Mallams. You find 'schools' with two little boys for pupils, and these close relations of the teacher; and you find others—the schools of famous Bida scholars—the classrooms of which (as a rule the *katamba* in the Mallam's house) are crowded with pupils. The teachers are very jealous of the reputation of their school. When I was a regular visitor to Bida Koran schools the Mallam of one which I had not yet visited came to me complaining that I had left out his school, and quoted as reference a Bida Mallam of very high standing who was a special friend of mine. In the large Koran schools the Mallam himself teaches only the adult students of 'knowledge', while the elementary teaching is carried out by his sons or certain advanced pupils.

[1] Bida learning has a great reputation even outside Nupe; Mallams from Bida have been given important posts in other countries, and several Bida Koran teachers have established flourishing schools in Ilorin.

[2] One aspect of this spiritual advice is divining, which, as we have seen, plays an important part even in such political activities as the election of a high officer of state or the preparation for war.